

COUNCIL FUNDS ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

With a landscape as flat as a pancake, it is little wonder that climbers in Cambridge are welcoming a new addition to the city-centre activity scene.

Sarah Juggins reports

It may be because Cambridge and the surrounding Fenland area is very flat, but the new climbing experience at Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre has taken off beyond all the expectations of manager Liane Shadrack, and her team at the trust-run sports facility.

Prior to the installation of the climbing centre, the sports centre, run by the Cambridge Sports Hall Trust, was already offering a range of facilities and activities. A large hall provides for sports such as badminton, basketball, five-a-side football and volleyball, while a well-equipped gym and well-being centre is busy with a regular clientele of both members and casual users. The staff at Kelsey Kerridge

also run, or organise, a number of clubs and activities, including boxercise, circuit training, spinning and new dance-fitness zumba classes.

However, the prospect of securing some additional funding from the city council gave the centre a chance to expand its offering and provide something new and exciting for the local community.

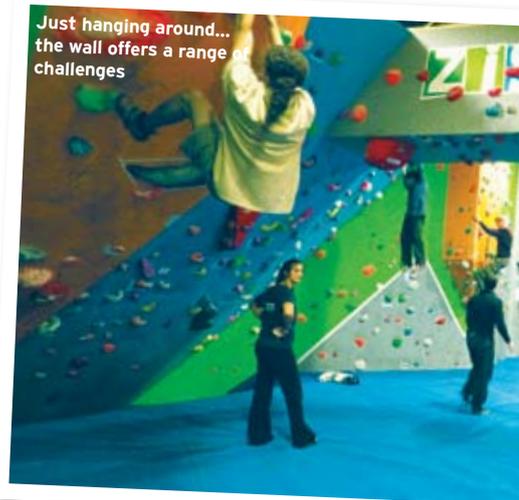
Identifying a need

'We carried out some quite extensive research to see what facilities people wanted to see at the centre,' said Shadrack. 'And once we had decided upon climbing facilities we set up a small committee that included representatives

from Cambridge Climbing Club, the Caving Club and Cambridge University Mountaineering club. We felt this input was essential as we wanted to provide a facility that best suited their needs.'

'We started work on our proposal nearly two years ago,' said Shadrack. 'Under the Section 106 agreement, the council had a pot of money, which could be spent on a community project. We just had to prove our project was going to be of benefit to the whole community.'

'We submitted our plans and the council put all the money, £95,000, into the project. In return, we have committed to providing an all-inclusive community facility. Our proposal included use by schools, the university and casual community users. You only have to look at who is using the wall at any given time to





see that it attracts users from a complete cross-section of society,' she added.

Additionally, the sports centre team is exploring ways to promote climbing to disadvantaged groups – those with learning disabilities, behavioural issues, or children and adults with confidence issues caused by bullying.

Debbie Kaye, head of arts and recreation

for the city council said: 'By working closely together, the trust and the council have been able to identify opportunities to improve the sports facilities on offer using contributions from housing developers.

'This has resulted in a fantastic new training and competition facility that's been enthusiastically welcomed by local climbing groups, and which can be used by people of all ages and climbing abilities.'

The room that now houses the climbing centre used to have a single badminton court and one wall dedicated to climbing. This allowed up to 16 people to climb actively at any one time. The new zone covers all four walls and provides bouldering surfaces totalling more than 200m². The centre-piece, in the middle of the room, is a 40-degree barrel linked to a central pillar via a four metre arch.

The existing wall has been kitted out with new belay anchors for teaching and an increased number of new hand-holds and foot-holds.

The spongy, safety floor, which covers the entire room, means that bouldering climbers do not need support, ropes or observers. Users register at reception and climb at whatever

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level, and for however long, they want to.

The walls have more than 1,600 bolt holds and regular route-setting will mean that the routes are changed every two months, offering new challenges to even the most dedicated climbers.

WALL IS STREET

In January I went along to the official opening of the Kelsey Kerridge climbing wall, and witnessed a fantastic display of climbing by Katy Whittaker, the former British Bouldering champion, and Steve McClure, who is acknowledged as the greatest rock climber in the UK.

What was more impressive, though, was the bouldering competition that took place prior to the main display.

Here a number of people ranging from a pre-teenage girl to a few people in their late 40s were engaged in an intense competition to become the bouldering champion.

However, the intensity of the competition was only displayed in the actual effort made as a climber tackled a route. Once they had descended, the competitors were chatting with each other, discussing the finer points of the climb and offering each other useful advice on the best technique to overcome a particularly difficult route.

Nowhere was there an intimidating competitiveness, just a sense that everyone was tackling the challenge together and all ability levels were welcome.

The aim of the competition was to negotiate a certain colour-coded route before moving on to a more difficult route. The easiest routes, those with the most numerous and easily-accessible foot and hand-holds, are green, and then the difficulty level increases through yellow, red and black.

Some of the competitors took time out

of their bouldering efforts to speak to me, and the general consensus was that this was a great addition to the sports and physical activity on offer in the city.

'I am really getting into it,' said one climber. 'I am back bouldering after many years away. There's a nice variety of steep bits, not so steep bits, faintly overhanging bits, overlappy bits, campus bits and squishy mat bits. There's an excellent colour-coded circuit system, so both the hard core and bumbles can pick something entertaining.'

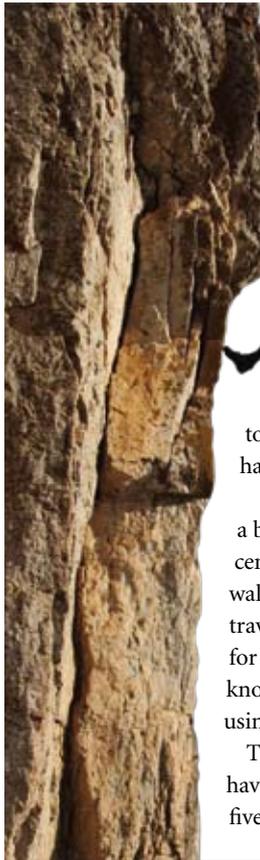
Another climber wrote on the Kelsey Kerridge website after the opening: 'The wall is open today. A group of us went for a play and it looks and feels great. About time Cambridge had a wall worth staying in town for. This is the first time I can remember leaving the Kelsey Kerridge wall pumped.'

The impression I got was of an activity that could be truly inclusive. There was no need for expensive equipment – most of the participants were wearing t-shirts and fabric trousers, and one climber even tackled a route in a black duffel coat and suit trousers! Climbing shoes, while not a necessity, would be helpful when tackling the harder routes, but trainers would be suitable for the beginner courses. Music was playing, which gave the zone a 'street-activity' feel but, with the age of the participants ranging from nine to 65, there was no feeling of this being an activity limited to any age or social group.

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Champion boulderer Katie Whittaker in action





Finger boards and a pull up bar provide an extra opportunity for climbers to do additional training.

An exciting vision

Shadrack met representatives from five companies before settling upon Zig-Zag as the preferred supplier. She said: 'Zig-Zag had a vision that was a brilliant use of space and very innovative.

They have been really good to work with, making sure we knew what was happening every step of the way.'

The team at the Cambridge centre has seen a big increase in numbers since the climbing centre was opened to the public in January. The wall now attracts climbers who had previously travelled 60 miles, or more, to Harlow or London for their training and competitions. And the knock-on effect has been an increase in people using other facilities as well as the climbing wall.

The installation has meant that staff members have added to their professional training and five members of staff are currently either fully-

BUILDING WALLS, SECTION BY SECTION

A Section 106 Agreement is a legal agreement between the planning authority and the applicant or developer, and any others that may have an interest in a piece of land or the buildings on it.

The agreement is effectively a planning obligation authorised by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by Planning and Compensation Act 1991 Section 12, and is used following the granting of planning permission for, normally major, developments.

It places an obligation on developers to provide community infrastructure to meet the needs of residents in new developments and/or to mitigate the impact of new developments on existing community facilities.

trained or undergoing instruction in wall climbing. Kelsey Kerridge has also been registered with the Association of British Climbing Walls to ensure that they are providing safety practices and quality management processes necessary to operate a climbing centre.

The centre is recognised among climbing enthusiasts as the best indoor bouldering facility in the south east.

The addition of the climbing centre to Kelsey Kerridge will have a knock-on effect, believes Shadrack. The sports centre is one of the few in the city that offers casual entry as well as membership options, most are privately-owned and charge a fee. With the current economic climate, customers are seeking walk-in options rather than monthly or yearly membership commitments. Shadrack sees the climbing centre as an attraction that will bring in new users, from a wide catchment area, as

MUSTAFA USTAMEHMETOGLU IS GYM MANAGER AT KELSEY KERRIDGE. HERE HE OFFERS SOME HANDY CLIMBING FITNESS TIPS FOR CLIMBERS

Climbing is a great hobby that is very demanding on the body. It looks like a lot of work for the upper body but, in fact, climbing also depends a lot on balance, weight distribution, strength, endurance, flexibility and technique.

1 Increase your whole body strength.

Climbing is both strength and technique dependent. If you do not have a minimum level of strength already, or you are not maintaining the strength that you do have, it may be important to do strengthening exercises.

2 Stretching for flexibility and injury prevention.

Good flexibility is needed to ensure that you are able to reach the next handhold, which could be quite a stretch away. Also you may need to raise your leg very high for the next foothold. So you need to be able to get into all sorts of awkward positions. Stretching exercises are great for climbing fitness. Remember to stretch and then hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds. To help avoid injury, make sure to stretch a few key areas:

- Wrist flexors and extensors
- Pectorals and front of shoulders
- Hips and inner thighs

3 Improve your core strength. Planks, plank leg raise and side plank cross are some of the exercises that you can do to improve your core strength for climbing.

To focus more on the abdominals, you can also add in any of a number of abdominal exercises to your routine, including bicycles and crunches. Just be sure to not overwork these muscles at the expense of the other core muscles - you're aiming for a strong, balanced core to improve your climbing.

4 Reduce your bodyweight. Build more lean muscle by supplementing your climbing training program with strength training, plus regular cardio activity. Building muscle can actually increase your fat loss, not to mention the gains you will see in your climbing performance due to improved muscle strength.

5 Increase aerobic endurance. Try to incorporate at least one or two days per week of cardio training into a climbing training regimen for overall fitness. Add in one or two days per week of 30 to 60-minute light cardio using a bike, cross trainer, stepper or simply running outdoors.

6 Train your legs. Climbers may benefit from working on strengthening and toning specific muscle groups, depending on their climbing goals and strengths/weaknesses. Common areas that often need attention include hamstrings, calves, and quads. Doing three sets of eight -12 reps of squats, hamstring curls and calf raises once or twice a week can help improve these areas.

7 Know when to take rest days. Your optimal climbing/training schedule depends on your climbing experience, where you're climbing, the difficulty of your workouts, and your lifestyle constraints. Use self-assessments to determine whether or not to climb or work out on any given day. If your energy levels and motivation are low, or your muscles feel sore, consider a rest day. By taking a rest day you will prevent injuries and reach your peak performance quicker.

8 Improve your hand/grip strength. For many climbers, hand and finger strength are the weakest link in their efforts to improve at climbing. To make matters worse, hand strength can be difficult to gain and train, due to the relative fragility of fingers when compared to the larger muscle groups used in climbing. Campusing on a campus board can help you develop better hand strength, as well as better overall contact strength, dynamic accuracy, and explosive power. Use caution, extreme moderation, and plenty of rest and recovery time when starting any grip strength-training program.

9 Increase your pull up strength and endurance. Pull-ups provide an uncomplicated way to improve climbing power and endurance. Pull power is a huge component of rock climbing, especially at the higher levels. A basic pull-up workout will improve a climber's power or endurance, depending on the starting level.

**SAFETY
NET**

Once the climbing centre at Kelsey Kerridge was confirmed, the manager joined the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC). This gave Shadrack and her team the security offered by professional advice and guidance.

The ABC was set up in 1994 on an informal basis. Initially four climbing centres: Rope Race, Manchester; The Rock Face, Birmingham; Undercover Rock, Bristol and The Foundry, Sheffield, got together to discuss issues facing the managers and owners of new-style dedicated climbing centres. They specifically discussed issues of staffing, customer safety and company management and liability.

In 1997 a decision was taken to formalise the discussions and meetings being undertaken into an association, and open up the meetings to a wider audience. In October 1997 the board was elected and the ABC became a formal company.

Two months later, 17 of the major climbing centres in the UK had joined as full members and started to contribute to advancing the ABC's objectives.

The ABC now includes more than 45 walls in its membership, and although many of these walls are dedicated climbing centres, increasingly, smaller leisure centres and school walls are benefiting from joining the association.

well as offering something new and exciting to existing customers.

The design, by climbing specialists Zig-Zag, has transformed a room that was often under-utilised into a central attraction and, perhaps more importantly for the centre manager, a profitable space. With the capacity to host large numbers of users at any one time, the climbing centre has become a model of efficient use of a redundant space.

Shadrack, however, is more concerned about keeping the commitment to provide opportunities for the community. 'The climbing centre is bringing in more people, but it is often a very different type of customer. They are not necessarily the people you will see going regularly to the gym or playing in a football match, and that is great because it shows we are attracting a wider part of the population.

'We like to think that we are a community-facility with private sector

“ The design by Zig-Zag has transformed a room that was often under-utilised into a central attraction

standards,' she said, adding that the fitness suite had enjoyed a recent overhaul and her team was always looking to refresh the classes offered.

Shadrack offered this advice to managers considering the installation of a climbing facility in their centre.

'We were lucky to have the support of the City Council, but the most important thing is to include the climbers in the discussions so that you can be confident that the facilities you are meeting provide for their

needs.

'We also took our time in choosing which contractor to work with as you need to be comfortable with who you are working with on a project of this scale.



From left: Liane Shadrack, mayor of Cambridge Shelia Stuart, Katie

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